



WORKING LANDS ENTERPRISE INITIATIVE

Service Provider and Producer Association Grant

FISCAL YEAR 2025 REQUEST FOR APPLICATIONS

Grants to provide business support services to Vermont agriculture, food, and forestry businesses, and to strengthen Vermont producer associations in these sectors.

KEY DATES

APPLICATION OPENING DATE: September 20, 2024

APPLICANT WEBINAR: Tuesday, September 24, 2024 11:00-12:00. [Register online to receive the Microsoft Teams information.](#) Webinar recording will be posted online.

APPLICATION DEADLINE: November 7, 2024 at 11:59pm

APPLICANT NOTIFICATION: Early January 2025

PROJECT DATES: March 1, 2025-June 30, 2026

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CONTACT INFORMATION

PROGRAM QUESTIONS

Clare Salerno
Program Coordinator
Clare.Salerno@vermont.gov
802-917-2637

WEBGRANTS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Rebecca Brockett
Grants Management Specialist
Rebecca.Brockett@vermont.gov
802-636-7016

Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets staff can assist applicants during State of Vermont business hours, Monday–Friday, 7:45 AM to 4:30 PM. Please note that immediate assistance may not be available shortly before deadlines.

WEBGRANTS

Applications for this program must be submitted through the [WebGrants](#) grants management system.

REGISTRATION

If you're new to WebGrants, submit the [WebGrants Registration Form](#). It usually takes about two business days to process registrations. Make sure to register for an account well before the application deadline.

SUBMISSION POLICY

Applicants must follow all instructions in this request for applications (RFA), including the dates and times for submitting applications. The Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets will only consider the last complete submission through WebGrants before the deadline as the official application. We cannot accept incomplete or late applications after the deadline, barring exceptional circumstances. The WebGrants system will not accept applications after the deadline.

SUBMISSION CONFIRMATION

After you've submitted your application successfully, you'll be taken to a page confirming your submission. This page will have an Application ID number. You'll also get an email confirming your submission.

SECTION 1: OVERVIEW & ELIGIBILITY

PROGRAM PURPOSE

[Vermont Act 142](#) of 2011 created the Working Lands Enterprise Initiative (WLEI) and the Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB). WLEB's vision is that our shared working landscape is the foundation of Vermont's evolving culture, vibrant economies, healthy ecosystems, and sense of place. WLEB's mission is to make strategic investments and develop policy recommendations that support a sustainable farm, food, and forest economy in Vermont.

The WLEB is made up of:

- Farmers, forestry business owners, and people working for farm, forest, and food system organizations
- Leadership and staff from the VT Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets; VT Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation; and VT Agency of Commerce and Community Development
- Vermont Housing & Conservation Board staff
- Vermont Economic Development Authority staff
- Vermont Sustainable Jobs Fund staff

For further context about the history of service providers and the Working Lands Enterprise Board, please see the [WLEI educational paper](#) on this topic.

ELIGIBILITY

This grant is for two types of applicants:

1. **Service providers**, which are organizations that provide business support services to agricultural and forestry businesses. The specific types of services eligible for funding are outlined later in this section.
2. **Producer associations**, also known as trade associations, industry trade groups, or business associations, are organizations founded and funded by businesses that operate in a specific industry. Vermont-based producer association groups that represent and promote Vermont agriculture, food, beverage, forest, or fiber products are eligible to apply.

Service provider grant projects should provide direct or indirect services to support Vermont-based working lands businesses through technical assistance and/or other forms of support. **Producer association grant projects** may also provide these services to their members. These services include:

- Market development, marketing plans, and sales planning
- Business and financial planning
- Business responses to COVID-19, flooding, and/or other crises
- Succession planning for next generation business owners

- Access to capital
- Manufacturing efficiencies or process flow
- Business research and development
- Workforce development

Producer association grant projects may relate to the development of the association itself in addition to or instead of providing the above services to members. Association development projects may include:

- Leadership and organizational development: Leadership development, strategic planning, leadership transition support/succession planning; board training and capacity building, by-law development, committee work, staff recruitment and/or training
- Membership development: Member recruitment and outreach, networking across businesses, web/communications capacity building, member skill building and exchanges, development of digital portals or tools for members
- Network building and collaboration: Initiatives that support collaborations between producer associations for improved efficiency and organizational sustainability

Applicant organizations/businesses should be based in Vermont. Businesses or organizations headquartered outside of VT can be eligible if the project or service being proposed is 100% focused on Vermont's working landscape and businesses. Please contact Clare.Salerno@vermont.gov to discuss eligibility for out-of-state applicants.

All business or organizational structures are eligible (e.g., Partnerships, Limited Liability Corporations, Sole Proprietorships, Cooperatives, Corporations, S Corporations, L3Cs, B Corporations, and/or non-profits).

All legally incorporated enterprises in VT must be registered with the VT Secretary of State. Sole proprietors using a business name other than their own name must have their assumed business name (formerly known as a trade name) registered with the Secretary of State.

Applicants must comply with all state regulations (e.g., water quality, taxes, child support) and in be good standing with the State of Vermont at the time of applying and during the entire grant period.

Applicants that previously applied for and/or received funds from a Working Lands grant or contract can re-apply for funding. Applicants who are current or previous grantees must explain whether the proposed project builds on previous work or is a separate project, as well as demonstrate how continued funding will be used to grow or improve the program. Services must be provided to a new cohort of businesses for each funding period.

AVAILABLE FUNDS

Up to \$370,000 is available to award.

MINIMUM & MAXIMUM AWARD

\$10,000-\$25,000 for pilot projects or projects that serve businesses in a specific region of Vermont

\$25,000-75,000 for projects that serve businesses statewide

No matching funds are required for this grant.

PROJECT LENGTH

15 months (March 2025-June 2026)

FUNDING SOURCE

State of Vermont legislative appropriation

SECTION 2: APPLICATION

HOW TO APPLY

Applications must be submitted via the online grants management system, [WebGrants](#), at agriculturegrants.vermont.gov between Friday, September 20, 2024 and Thursday, November 7, 2024 at 11:59 PM. Paper applications will not be accepted. Application components are outlined below as they will appear in WebGrants.

For technical instructions on the application submission process, please see the [WebGrants Application Guide](#).

STANDARD APPLICATION QUESTIONS

Questions in the following five sections are asked of all applicants seeking grant funding through VAAFM's Agricultural Development Division. Questions marked with an asterisk (*) are required.

Applicant Information

- Which of the following categories best describes the person/people completing this application? Please select all that apply*
 - Owner of applicant organization
 - Employee of applicant organization
 - Technical service provider
 - Business advisor
 - Grant writer
 - Family/friend
 - Other (specify)
- Name*
- Email address*
- Phone number*
- Preferred method of communication*
- Job title*
- How did you hear about this funding opportunity?*

Grant Request Information

- Amount of grant funds requested (\$)

Note: Refer to the Request for Applications (RFA) for the allowable funding request range.

Applicant's Business/Organization Information

Some questions in this section may not apply to the business/organization and are optional.

- Legal name of the organization*

- Organizational structure (legal structure for tax purposes)
 - 501(c)(3)
 - B Corporation
 - Cooperative
 - Corporation
 - L3C
 - LLC
 - Non-profit
 - Partnership
 - S Corporation
 - Sole Proprietorship
 - Other
- Primary operation type
 - Farm, forestry, or other land-based operation
 - Processing operation
 - Distribution operation
 - College/university
 - Early childhood education program
 - Governmental entity
 - Independent business advisor
 - Independent contractor (other)
 - Manufacturer
 - Other non-profit
 - Political/advocacy organization
 - Private foundation
 - Producer/trade association
 - Religious organization
 - Retail operation
 - School – private/independent
 - School – public
 - Technical assistance provider
 - Other
- If the business/organization is a farm, forestry or other land-based operation:
 - Estimated number of acres (owned) currently in production
 - Estimated number of leased or rented acres currently in production
 - Estimated number of acres, if any, currently in conservation
 - What is the business/organization's primary product category?
 - Apiary
 - Cannabis
 - Dairy
 - Grains and Legumes
 - Hay & Forage Crops
 - Hemp

- Livestock/Poultry (including equine, meat, and fiber animals)
 - Logging, Sawmill, & Firewood
 - Maple
 - Nursery Crops & Christmas Trees
 - Produce (Fruit, Vegetables, Mushrooms, Nuts, Flowers, Herbs)
 - Other (specify)
- Street address*
 - Town/City*
 - State
 - County*
 - Number of full-time employees, including owner(s)*
 - Number of part-time and seasonal employees
 - Estimated number of volunteer hours that benefit the business/organization in a typical year
 - Years in operation*
 - Business/organization's website URL, if one exists
 - Social media handles the business/organization uses, if any
 - Has the business/organization applied for any grants through the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFMM) in the past five years?*
 - Did you receive any of the grants from VAAFMM that you applied for?
 - Please specify the VAAFMM grant(s) you received.

Optional Business/Organization Information

- What is the business/organization's most recent annual operating budget?
 - Less than \$50,000
 - \$50,000-\$100,000
 - \$100,000-\$250,000
 - \$250,000-\$500,000
 - \$500,000-\$1,000,000
 - \$1,000,000-\$3,000,000
 - \$3,000,000-\$5,000,000
 - \$5,000,000-\$10,000,000
 - More than \$10,000,000
- What is the estimated median hourly wage for all employees?
- Which of the following benefits does the business/organization provide to employees and/or volunteers?
- Does the business/organization employ H-2A farmworkers?
 - If so, how many H-2A farmworkers does the business/organization employ in a typical year?

Voluntary Demographic Information

The Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets is collecting voluntary demographic information to better serve our constituents and inform the development of

future grant programs. Please click the link to be taken to complete this anonymous survey: <https://forms.office.com/g/dp8zqWrgxL>

The demographic survey is hosted through a separate online platform to ensure that any information collected through the survey cannot be linked in any way to your WebGrants application. Funding decisions are based solely on the information provided in your WebGrants application. Any information collected through the demographic survey is anonymous and will only be used to help improve the programming and services offered by the Development Division of the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets.

WORKING LANDS ENTERPRISE INITIATIVE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

Project Information

- Project title that briefly summarizes the project
- Will this project operate on a statewide level or local/regional level?
 - If the project is focused on an organization or business in a specific region, please name that region(s).
- Is this a pilot program? A pilot program is a small-scale trial program that tests new services, products, or tools. Generally, a pilot program is a new initiative, or one begun in the last 1-2 years.
- General sector(s) served by this project (agriculture, forestry, both)
- If applicable, select the topics that will be addressed by your proposed project as related to your producer association's development:
 - Leadership and organizational development
 - Membership development
 - Network building and collaboration
- If applicable, please select the services offered through your proposed project:
 - Market development, marketing plans, and sales planning
 - Business and financial planning
 - Business responses to COVID-19, flooding, and/or other crises
 - Succession planning for next generation business owners
 - Access to capital
 - Manufacturing efficiencies or process flow
 - Business research and development
 - Workforce development
 - Business network building
- Describe your organization, including key activities, number of members (if applicable), leadership structure, years in operation, etc.
- Provide a brief overview of your project, including how requested funds will be used. Explain why your project is being proposed and what makes it timely and important. Identify the target audience of the project and/or services. If applicable, describe how the proposed project will fill an existing gap(s) in

services available to working lands businesses, or will address identified barriers to these businesses' participation in continued education/skill-building programs.

- Describe the core team of individuals who will be involved in the project and their expertise that will contribute to project success. If applicable, identify any partner organizations expected to participate in the project and specify their role.
- If applicable, estimate how many businesses will be served through this project.
- If applicable, describe how you will recruit participants in the programs/services offered through the grant project.
- If applicable, describe how this project will reach historically underserved and/or marginalized communities. Identify strategies you will employ to engage these communities. If applicable, include information about how the project is related to your organization's work to reach these communities. Examples of historically underserved and/or marginalized communities are people living below the poverty threshold and/or facing food insecurity or homelessness, immigrants, LGBTQ+ people, people of color, people with disabilities, veterans, women, etc.

Goals and Expected Measurable Outcomes

Enter your project goals into each row (800 character limit per box). Enter at least three and not more than five goals. For each goal, enter an indicator of your organization's performance toward that goal (e.g., number of businesses reached). Finally, create a measurable outcome by adding anticipated numbers to your performance measure (e.g., 15 businesses will be trained by April 2026).

Expected measurable outcomes should be achieved within the 15-month grant period.

For additional reference, view WLEI's [Goals and Expected Measurable Outcomes](#) page.

Goal	Performance Measure	Expected Measurable Outcome
Example: Develop a Board Nominating Committee	Example: Number of new Board members onboarded via the new Nominating Committee	Example: Using candidates identified by the Nominating Committee, increase the number of Board members from 6 to 10 by December 2025

Project Work Plan

Enter at least three project activities into the Project Work Plan table (800-character limit per box):

- **Project Activity** – List the activities (i.e. milestone tasks) that are necessary to accomplish your project objectives. Include your performance monitoring/data

collection activities. If you request funds for travel, these activities must also be included.

- **Personnel/Responsible Parties** – Indicate the project participants who will do the work involved in each activity, including yourself, employees, and/or contractors. Any personnel or contractors referenced in your budget must be included to demonstrate their role and justify associated funds.
- **Estimated Timeline/Completion Date** – Identify your project activity timeline, including the activity start date and projected completion date. Project activities must be completed within the 15-month grant period starting in March 2025 and ending in June 2026.

Project Activity	Personnel/Responsible Parties	Estimated Timeline/Completion
Example: Convene stakeholders for event planning sessions	Example: Executive Director	Example: March 2025 – June 2025

Project Budget Budget Template

For each expense category that applies to your project budget, complete the corresponding row in the table below. Make sure that the total in the grant request column is the same as the grant request amount that you entered in the first section of the application. Your budget should include any other funding sources supporting the proposed project as matching funds, if applicable. Up to 10% of requested grant funds may be used for indirect costs (i.e., facilities/administrative costs).

Costs that happen before the grant is awarded are not eligible. Please round to the nearest whole dollar amount.

Expense Category	Grant Request	Additional Project Costs (if applicable)	Source of Additional Project Costs (if applicable)	Details/Purpose	Total
Salaries/Wages (Personnel)					
Benefits					
Travel					

Supplies					
Contractual					
Other Direct Costs					
Indirect Costs					
TOTAL					

Budget Narrative (1000-character limit for each question):

- Provide further detail on proposed amounts for all line items, as needed.
- Will the project cost more than the grant amount you are requesting?
- Describe efforts to fund this project with other sources and, if applicable, why those efforts have not been sufficient. Identify any other grants/loans you are currently applying for (or plan to apply for) to support this project, if any. If you answered "Yes" to the previous question, explain whether the funds that will cover remaining project costs are already available, or if they are coming from another grant or source that is not yet confirmed.
- Upload a quote or cost estimate for any budget items exceeding \$5,000 (not including salaries/wages and benefits).
- Describe your intended methods of tracking staff time and expenses associated with the grant.
- If Working Lands funds are not received, explain how this will impact your project, e.g., adjusted scope, lower probability of success, would not happen, and/or an urgent window of opportunity would be missed.
- If you have previously received a Working Lands grant, describe how your proposed project relates to or builds upon your previous Working Lands grant project. Or, state if the project proposed here is unrelated to any past Working Lands funding.

Additional Attachments

Space provided to upload up to five documents (must be in PDF format). If you have more than 5 documents to upload, you can combine them into 1-5 PDF documents.

- For producer associations applying for organizational development activities, upload at least one letter of support from the association’s governing board to justify the current need for and importance of this project.
- (Optional) Upload letters of support from members or organizational partners.
- (Optional) Upload additional documentation that further demonstrates the nature of the project, such as project outlines, summary of results from related previous work, photos, website screen shots, additional written information, etc.

Signature of Compliance

Demonstration of applicant compliance with state regulations and good standing with the State of Vermont – e-signature and date

- Completed [Water Quality Compliance Form](#) upload

SECTION 3: APPLICATION SCORING CRITERIA

APPLICATION REVIEW

Working Lands grant funds will be awarded to applicants whose projects benefit agriculture and forest-based businesses through a competitive review process. A committee of Working Lands Enterprise Board (WLEB) members, State agency staff, and industry partners will review submitted applications and make funding recommendations to the full WLEB for final awarding decisions. Applicants will be notified by email of application approval or denial, with specific feedback, in the first week of January 2025.

APPLICATION SCORING

An application can be strong without scoring highly in all scoring categories. Criteria that will inform scoring of application quality are:

Quality of Concept and Management Team (20 points total)

- The proposed activities are a reasonable approach to address business' needs. (10 points).
- The proposed activities are clear and can be conducted within the 15-month grant period. (5 points)
- The management team demonstrates previous experience in the sector necessary to conduct the proposed activities. If applicable, a strong board is in place to set priorities and provide oversight of operational leadership. Staff and/or contracted providers have relevant operational skill sets, such as marketing, production, or business management. (5 points)

Expected Measurable Outcomes (20 points total)

- The applicant identifies clear and measurable project outcomes related to the services provided and/or the development of the producer association. The proposed outcomes are a reasonable result of the activities proposed. (10 points)
- The applicant demonstrates how services provided and/or association development will enhance Vermont's working landscape. (5 points)
- The project outcomes can be realistically completed within the 15-month grant period. (5 points)

Budget (15 points total)

- The proposed budget table and narrative is clear, realistic, and well-planned. (15 points)

Collaboration (15 points total)

- The applicant demonstrates effective collaboration and leverages partnerships across their organization, among businesses, and with other organizations to promote project success. (5 points)
- Relationships with statewide networks (non-profit or for-profit) do not facilitate competition or redundancy with other services. (5 points)
- The project involves a robust outreach process to recruit participants and/or involves a knowledge sharing strategy with partners or the public about program results and replication. (5 points)

Demonstrated Project Need (15 points total)

- Applications providing services to businesses demonstrate that there is a credible business need for those services. The need for services is demonstrated by evidence of past work, strategic plans, partner collaboration, or optional letters of support. For producer associations doing organizational development work, the need for the work outlined is confirmed by the applicant's governing board, as demonstrated in the required letter(s) of support. Producer associations doing organizational development work may also demonstrate need by referencing strategic plans, evidence from members, optional letters of support, etc. (15 points)

Engagement, Equity, and Equality (10 points total):

- The applicant demonstrates how this project, as it relates to the organization and its mission, will reach one or more historically underserved and/or marginalized community(ies). (10 points)

Financial Need (5 points total):

- The applicant demonstrates financial sustainability of the organization, while showing an evident need for Working Lands Enterprise Initiative funding. Project cannot be fully funded through other sources sought by the applicant. (5 points)

SECTION 4: GRANT MANAGEMENT & REPORTING

GRANT AGREEMENT & PAYMENT

Prior to receiving funding, successful applicants must sign a grant agreement with the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets (VAAFAM) indicating their intent to complete the proposed project and authorizing VAAFAM to monitor progress. The grant agreement will include provisions (terms and conditions) set by the State of Vermont as well as any program-specific requirements. Review [Attachment C - Standard State Provisions for Contracts and Grants](#) (revised 12/7/2023) at bgs.vermont.gov/purchasing-contracting/forms for the most recent state provisions.

Prior to commencement of work and release of any payments, grantees must submit:

1. A current [IRS Form W-9](#) (Request for Taxpayer Identification Number and Certification), signed within the past six months;
2. A certificate of insurance consistent with the requirements set forth in [Attachment C](#) of the grant agreement (not required if grantee already has a current certificate of insurance on file with VAAFAM);
3. Documentation that verifies pledged matching funds, as applicable.

GRANTEE PAYMENT SCHEDULE

Except for the first payment following grant agreement signing, grant payments are based upon project performance and completion of project activities. Progress will be communicated via status reports, which must be approved by the State grant program manager before claims (payment requests) are approved. All claims will be submitted and approved via [WebGrants](#) at agriculturegrants.vermont.gov.

Working Lands grant funds are typically distributed according to the following schedule:

1. Up to 40% of the grant award following signing of the grant agreement, plus submission and approval of an initial claim;
2. Up to an additional 40% of the grant award (80% total) at the mid-point of the project, following completion and approval of the Interim Report demonstrating project progress, and a second claim;
3. Final 20% (or other remaining amount) of the grant award, following submission and approval of the Final Report demonstrating project completion and satisfactory achievement of expected measurable outcomes, and a final claim.

Grantees must maintain documentation of project costs, both those paid with grant funds and with matching funds, throughout the grant period. Accurate expense totals are a required component of status reporting.

REPORTING REQUIREMENTS

Prior to receipt of the second and third grant payments, respectively, grant recipients must complete an Interim Report and Final Report in [WebGrants](#). Reports will include a narrative of project accomplishments to date, progress toward meeting expected goals and outcomes, a budget table showing amounts of expended grant and matching funds, and high-resolution digital photos in .jpg format that demonstrate project work. Grantees will be expected to collaborate with VAAFAM staff to measure the impact of their project on businesses served.

Grantees must be willing to share project details, including successes and challenges, with the public, the WLEB, and the media, which illustrate how the grant is impacting Vermont's working lands economies. This may occur through media inquiries, press events on location, and/or site visits from VAAFAM staff, WLEB members, and/or their stakeholder partners.

APPENDIX

Program Provisions

Working Lands Grant agreements are held between the State of Vermont and the business or, where applicable, the business entity. Should the business entity cease to exist, or if the business entity to which this grant is issued becomes inactive, the State may suspend or cancel this Grant immediately, and the State shall be under no obligation to pay or further pay grantee.

Ready to begin work: Grantee must be ready to begin project work immediately following execution of this grant agreement. If grantee anticipates a delay or experiences a delay of more than two months, grantee shall submit to the grant manager via email an explanation for the delay and note the extent to which the delay will/will not impact project completion. Similarly, grantees should submit their initial claim for funds reimbursement within two months of receipt of the grant agreement. An explanation must be sent to the grant administrator if no request for reimbursement is anticipated within the first two months of the grant.

Publicly known and open to inspection: Except for grantee proprietary and personal identifying data, as noted per 1V.S.A. § 317(c), grantee names, projects, the amount of grant awards, and all other information regarding Working Lands grant projects are considered public information and are open to inspection. Grantee can also anticipate communication from other Working Lands partners and stakeholders regarding project successes and accomplishments.

Grantee Confidential and/or Proprietary Information: Grantee is responsible for noting all information, data, project results and narrative text which it considers confidential and/or proprietary in its reports and communications with the state. Grantee financials are automatically classified as confidential by the state.

Working Lands Enterprise Initiative, as a public instrumentality, is subject to the Vermont Public Records Law, 1 VSA § 315 - 320. The statute contains specific exemptions for tax-related information of persons, financial information of an individual or business, and trade secrets. This information will be held in confidential files by the Working Lands Enterprise Board and will not be available for public inspection under the Public Records Law.

The Working Lands Enterprise Board and the state of Vermont consider the following information about applicants to be subject to public record: contact information of applicants; names, description, and contact information of applying enterprise or organization; the purpose and amount of any Working Lands Enterprise Funds received; and grantee communications. Other information may be shared in aggregate form (without identifying individual business info).

Acknowledgement: All meetings and gatherings held as a result of this grant will recognize the Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets and the Working Land Enterprise Board as a funder. Written and electronic materials produced shall include text acknowledging the same and shall also feature a Vermont Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets graphic. Grantee may be required to reprint event flyers, posters, and/or brochures or repost meeting announcements if the State learns of grantee's failure to acknowledge the Working Lands Enterprise Board as a funder.

Tax Implications: We recommend that all entities consult with a tax accountant as needed regarding how to report grant awards for tax purposes, including advising on your tax return. State of Vermont staff and Working Lands partners are not authorized to advise or provide input on tax-related information, including the completion of federal forms.